

JANE KIRCHNER: I'm Jane Kirchner. I live in Northern Virginia, and I work for the National Wildlife Federation, online advocacy manager. I'd like to thank the Department of Interior for conducting the review of the federal coal leasing program, because this program has such an immense and lasting impact on America's public lands, and these are the lands that belong to all of us. And I really appreciate also the public input sessions and comment period so citizens truly have an opportunity to share their concerns directly with you. Today, I'd like to express concerns regarding the protection of wildlife and water quality from the impacts of mining coal on public lands. Unfortunately, the resultant pollution and degradation from coal mining can continue for thousands of years after the coal has been extracted. Here are a few examples of the impacts to consider as you make reforms to the program: The degradation of aquatic habitats is a major impact of coal mining, may be apparent many miles from a mining site. Sediment contamination of surface water is common with mining. Sediment yields may increase to a thousand times their former level as a result of strip mining. The heaviest sediment pollution of a drainage normally comes within 5 to 25 years after mining. And in some areas unreclaimed soil piles, I'm sorry, spoil piles continue to erode even 50 to 65 years after the area has been mined. Presence of acid-forming materials exposed as a result of mining can affect aquatic wildlife by eliminating habitat and by causing direct destruction of some species. Lesser concentrations can suppress productivity, growth rate and reproduction of many aquatic species. Acids, dilute concentrations of heavy metals and high alkalinity can cause severe damage to wildlife in some areas. In fact, the duration of acidic-waste pollution can be long. Estimates of the time required to leach exposed acidic materials in the Eastern United States range from 800 to 3,000 years. It is way beyond a business life cycle calculation. Mule deer, pronghorn antelope, sage grouse, elk, and hundreds of bird species including eagles make their home in the Powder River Basin of Wyoming and Montana. And as you mentioned before, that is a major coal region. The National Wildlife Federation and Natural Resources Defense Council commissioned a study of the health of wildlife in this major coal producing region. More than 30 percent of the mule deer and pronghorn herds evaluated were found to be unhealthy. Notably, the mule deer herds evaluated, the only one that was found to be healthy was the one living in an area without any energy development within its boundaries. I urge you

to look beyond immediate or short-term, cosmetic reclamation. Reforming the Federal Coal Program must include new protections, prohibitions and management actions to fully protect wildlife populations and the very vulnerable habitats they all depend on. Thank you very much.